CHAPTER 3
JOB DESIGN FRAMEWORKS

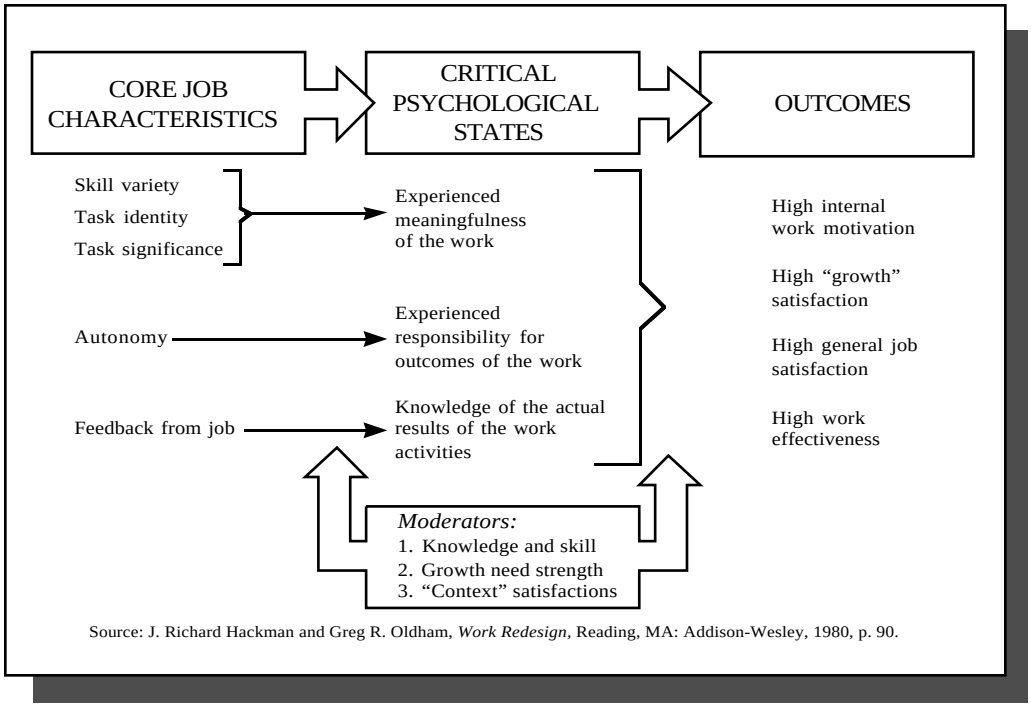

Figure 3-1. The Complete Job Characteristics Model

The Job Characteristics Model

The Job Characteristics Model (Figure 3-1), proposed by Hackman & Oldham,[1] suggests that five core job characteristics influence three critical psychological states. The three psychological states can then be used to predict four outcome variables. Three moderating factors affect the relationships between the core dimensions and psychological states, as well as the relationships between the psychological states and the outcomes.

Hackman and Oldham propose that any job can be described in terms of five core dimensions:

- *Skill Variety* – the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities so the worker can use a number of different skills and talents.

[1] J. Richard Hackman and Greg R. Oldham, *Work Redesign* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1980).

- *Task Identity* – the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work.
- *Task Significance* – the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people.
- *Autonomy* – the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out.
- *Feedback* – the degree to which carrying out work activities required by the job results in the individual's receiving direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance.

The first three core dimensions cause an employee to view work as meaningful or important, worthwhile and valuable. Autonomy affects the employee's sense of personal responsibility for outcomes. Immediate feedback from the job allows the employee to know how well he or she is doing the job. Another way of saying this is that the employee will receive more internal rewards when he or she learns (knowledge of results) that he or she personally (experienced responsibility) has performed well on a task that he or she cares about (experienced significance).[2] The more these conditions are present, or at least perceived, the more motivated the employee will be, and performance and satisfaction will also increase. All of these relationships are moderated by three factors:

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- *Task-Relevant Knowledge and Skills* – the employee's skills and level of knowledge will affect how the employee views his or her ability to complete tasks.
- *Employee's Need for Growth* – employees with a high need for self-esteem and self-actualization are more likely to experience the three psychological states when a job contains the core dimensions.
- C*ontext Satisfiers* – these are measures of the degree to which employees may be preoccupied with problems of pay, job security, co-worker and supervisor relationships, and therefore unable to experience the growth and personal development opportunities of an enriched job.

The job characteristics model offers five suggestions for managers:[3]

- *Combine Tasks* – Managers should seek to take existing, separate tasks and combine them into larger modules of work. This would increase skill variety and task identity.
- *Create Natural Work Units* – Form employee tasks into an identifiable and meaningful whole piece of work. This would increase employee ownership of work and increase the chance that an employee would perceive the work as meaningful and important.

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[2] Stephen P. Robbins, *Essentials of Organizational Behavior*, 3rd Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), p. 71.

[3] Hackman and Oldham, pp. 35-142.

- E*stablish Client Relationships* – Establish direct relationships between the user of a good or service and the employee. This would increase skill variety, feedback and autonomy.
- *Expand Jobs Vertically* – Give the employee more responsibility, discretion and control over work. This would increase autonomy by closing the gap between the controlling and performing aspects of work.
- *Open Feedback Channels* – Employees need to know how well they are performing, and whether their performance is improving or not. This feedback should be delivered directly as the employee performs tasks, not on a time delayed or occasional basis.

Tests of the Job Characteristics Model have generally produced good results, but several criticisms of the model remain. For example, the research evidence concerning both attitudes and task characteristics must be obtained from the job holders. Consequently, high correlations between an employee's desire for the core dimensions, the presence of the core dimensions, and their satisfaction may reflect the person's desire for consistency rather than on any other factors.[4] Moreover, although the model works well for people with high growth need, it is weak in describing the process for those with low growth need strength.[5] Despite these criticisms, the model still appears to have much practical value as a basis for job design.

The Social Information Processing Approach

. . . the social environment of the organization affects the characteristics used to describe the work environment.

In response to the criticisms of the Job Characteristics Model, Salancik and Pfeffer proposed the "social information processing" approach to job design. In formulating their model (Figure 3-2), they questioned the assumption embedded in the Job Characteristics Model that properly designed jobs better fulfill certain needs people have. In this connection, Salancik and Pfeffer distinguished between objective and perceived job properties. They argued that the social environment of the organization affects the characteristics used to describe the work environment. These effects occur through several processes. One process is that of the overt statements of coworkers on a worker's attitudes. Each worker is susceptible to the statements of coworkers for two reasons. First, because jobs are complex stimuli and a worker may be confused as to how to react, the statements of coworkers can provide signals on of how to react. A second process is the worker's desire to fit in or agree with coworkers.

The next way the social environment influences the worker is by making certain aspects of the environment more or less salient. In other words, coworkers can give clues as to what environmental features are more important. They can do this by talking about these aspects more frequently or just by noting them and not others.

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[4] Jen A. Algera, "'Objective' and Perceived Task Characteristics as a Determinant of Reactions by Task Performers," *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, Vol. 56, No 2, p. 95. Cited in Ivan T. Robertson and Mike Smith, *Motivation and Job Design* (Bradford on Avon, Great Britain: Dotesios, 1985), p. 58.

[5] Karlene Roberts and William Glick, "The Job Characteristics Approach to Task Design: A Critical Review," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 66, No 2, p. 196. Cited in Robertson *et al*., p. 59.

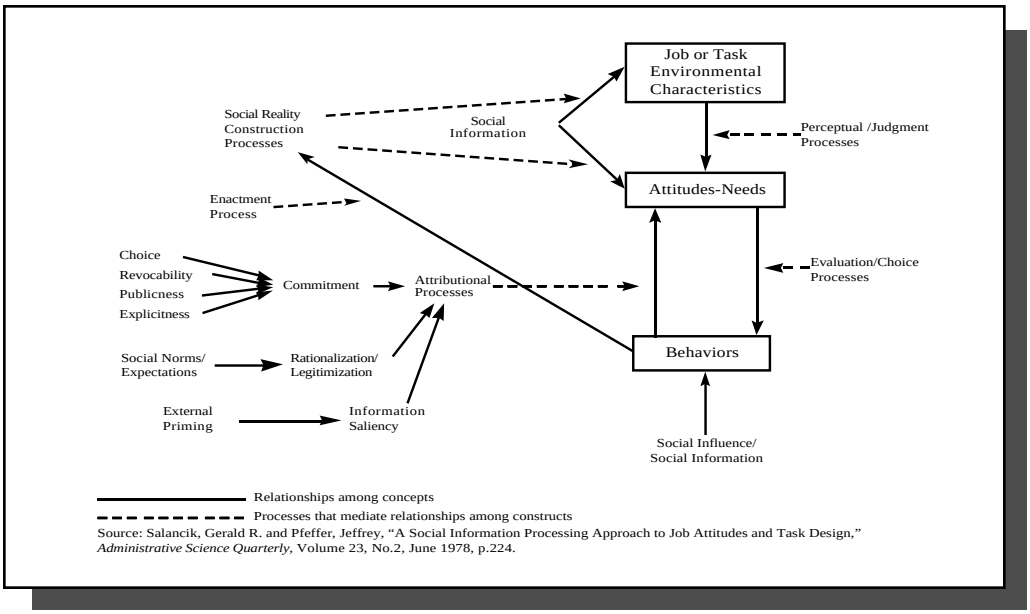

Figure 3-2. A Social Information Processing Approach to Attitudes, Behavior, and Job Characteristics

The social context also affects the individual through interpretation of environmental cues. Coworkers not only focus attention on certain events, they convey their own interpretations of these events as well. The interpretations that develop may be socially determined. For example, when a supervisor disciplines an employee for substandard performance, the supervisor may be viewed as lacking concern for the employee or, alternatively, as concerned for the well-being of the firm. The interpretation that dominates may be partially determined by the social context.

Finally, other processes affect the individual by influencing how the individual interprets his or her own needs. "In other words, people learn what their needs, values, and requirements should be in part from their interactions with others."[6]

. . . many things affecting how the individual views the job are a result of general social values and are not controllable by the organization or the individual.

Salancik and Pfeffer also propose that the individual's own past behavior influences how his or her perception of present circumstances. Thus the individual's commitment to the task depends upon information about his or her past behavior that is most salient at the time and the social norms that may or may not legitimize the individual's past behavior.

Commitment is made when an individual chooses to engage in a task, when the decision is irrevocable, when the decision is public, and when the decision is explicit or well-defined. It has been demonstrated that when individuals commit themselves to a task, they can develop attitudes consistent with their commitment. In other words, individuals committed to a task are more likely to develop positive feelings toward the task even when the rewards from doing the task seem dubious to an objective observer.

In addition to commitment, how a person rationalizes his or her behavior is important. People develop justifications for their actions as a way of making such behavior meaningful and explainable. Justification for job activities can be associated

[6] Gerald R. Salancik and Jeffrey Pfeffer, "A Social Information Processing Approach to Job Attitudes and Task Design," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June 1978), p. 230.

with many things in the environment – the culture, the features of the job, or individual traits. This may mean, however, that many things affecting how the individual views the job are a result of general social values and are not controllable by the organization or the individual. One way an organization can manipulate this process is through the construction of a "rationalizing mythology." For example, screening and recruiting activities become rationalized as aiding organizational effectiveness and performance, while also ensuring that those selected become convinced of the importance of their assignments. Uniforms, titles, organizational sagas, company newspapers, and the passing of stories about organizational accomplishments all facilitate the development of a mythology which provides the meaning, importance, and justification of work activities.[7]

This model, like the Job Characteristics Model, has received some criticism. Although much of the research underpinning the model showed that the social environment does play a role in job perception, little was found to refute the Job Characteristics Model. Having said this, however, there are some possible lessons to take from this work that may help an organization to motivate employees.

. . . it is in the organization's best interest to foster commitment in the individual employees.

The first important implication that might be taken from this discussion is that it is in the organization's best interest to foster commitment in the individual employees. Beginning with the process, the organization should explicitly disclose other options available elsewhere. This adds to the sense of free choice. Once the decision is made, having a contract (irrevocability) that is explicit and public commits the individual to the job. After the individual is hired, choices about other career options are less important (and may, in fact, be detrimental if the person decides to leave), but offering choice in tasks to be performed and setting mutually accepted goals can help foster commitment to individual tasks.

The organization should also be mindful of how corporate signals affect the saliency and meaning of events that occur. For example, posting procedural warnings and signs may inadvertently emphasize that workers are doing the same tasks over and over and, therefore, doing boring work. On the other hand, calling attention to the social importance of a task may make it more meaningful. Another example already outlined above is that of the supervisor disciplining a substandard performer. If the organization is seen as trustworthy, then employees will see that their own best interests are served by trying to ensure everyone carries his or her fair share of the burden.

The third way an organization might affect the social context is through proper use of surveys. This may not seem obvious from the prior discussion, but if thought about in terms of salience, the connection becomes more apparent. If managers conduct surveys only when they think problems might be developing, the employees will pick up on this and assume that there already are problems based simply on the fact that someone is asking questions. Also, it has been demonstrated that by giving signals that a problem exists and that changes are required, an organization will create an expectation of change in the employees. Then, if no changes are seen in a timely manner (even if management can show that they are unnecessary), employees may get discouraged by a perceived lack of management concern. By using routine

[7] Salancik and Pfeffer, p. 232.

surveys, management may actually be able to sense problems earlier without unduly startling the employees or creating unrealistic and unwanted expectations.

One of the most disconcerting things about this perspective is that there is much in the culture of an organization that seems out of control of management. Workers' attitudes and values can be very hard to ascertain or influence. Still, taking a critical look at the social climate in the organization and trying to foresee how organizational decisions might play in this climate seem to be offer important proactive possibilities for managers.

An Integrated Theory of Task Design

To assess the relative merits of the Job Characteristics Model and the Social Information Processing approach, Griffen *et al.* conducted an experiment to test the effects of both task properties and social cues.[8] Subjects worked for one hour on jobs that were either very low or very high in core job dimensions. While they worked, they also received social cues about the tasks they were performing. The results of this experiment showed that changes in both core task dimensions and social cues resulted in predicted changes in perceptions and attitudes. This led Griffen *et al.* to develop a framework (Figure 3-3) that attempted to integrate both views into one theory.

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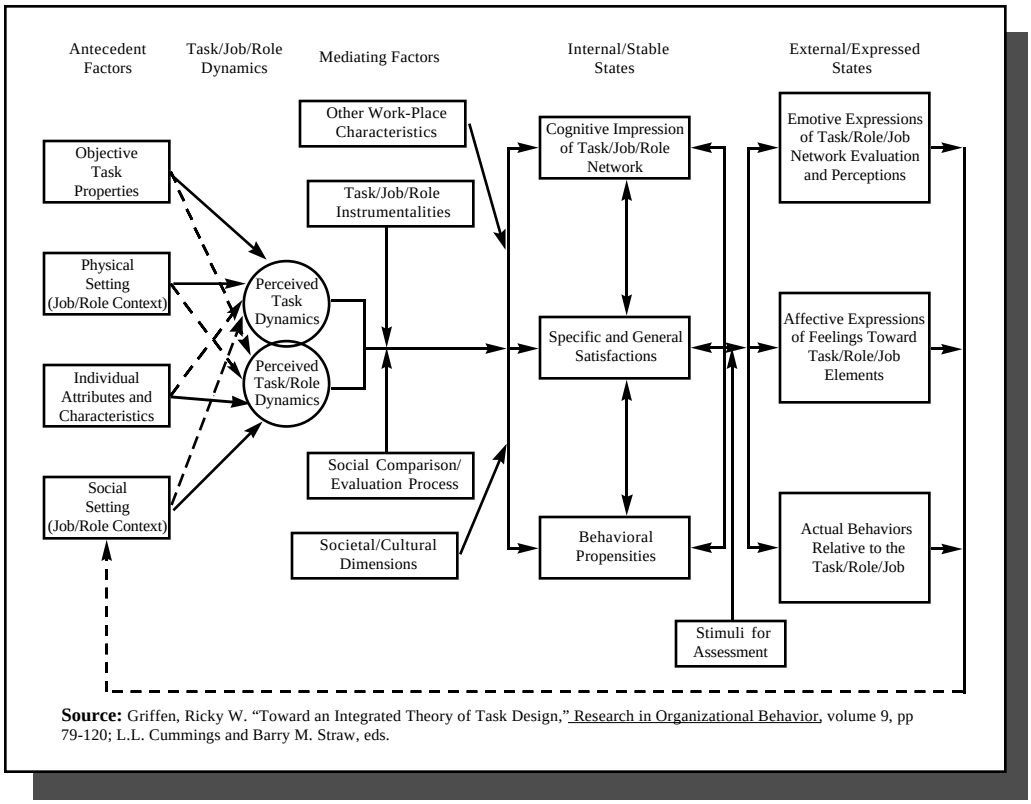
The integrated theory lists four antecedent factors that affect the "Task/Role/Job Dynamics Network." For this theory, *task* is defined as the set of prescribed activities a person performs during a typical work period, a *role* is defined as the decision making rights of the person performing the task, and a *job* is defined as the array of elements and dimensions of the organization with which the individual comes into contact. The job can be seen to encompass both the task and the role. The network idea reflects the fact that people seldom form perceptions and attitudes in a compartmentalized fashion. In other words, people's perceptions about job, task and role are interrelated.

The perceptions and attitudes from the task/role/job network affect the Internal/Stable States of the individual. The theory proposes that, over time, an individual builds up feelings about his or her job. In general, as this repository of feelings grows, the total set takes on an positive, negative, or neutral state and becomes more stable. The three states in the framework exist in the individual on a fairly consistent basis.

The theory also suggests that several factors mediate the relationships between the job/role/task network and the internal/stable states. In other words, the relationships are far from independent. There are many external factors that affect the formation of the internal/stable states.

Finally, the internal states are predicted to cause external/expressed states. These can vary based on mood, emotions or other experiences, or due to some other stimuli.

[8] Ricky W. Griffin, T. Bateman, S. Wayne and T. Head, "Objective and Social Factors As Determinants of Task Perceptions and Responses: An Integrated Perspective and Empirical Investigation," Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 30, pp. 501-523. Cited in Ricky W. Griffin and Gary C. McMahan, "Job Design, A Contemporary Review and Future Prospects," CEO publication T 93-12 (232). October 1993.



Source: Griffen, Ricky W. "Toward an Integrated Theory of Task Design," Research in Organizational Behavior, volume 9, pp 79-120; L.L. Cummings and Barry M. Straw, eds.

Figure 3-3. Integrated Theory of Task Design

The act of expression may then affect the initial antecedent factors, especially individual attributes and characteristics and the social setting, as the process repeats itself.

. . . task characteristics and the social climate can work together or against each other in affecting worker attitudes and motivation.

It must be stated that this theory was not advanced to replace either the job characteristics model or the social information processing approach, but rather to demonstrate how these two models might be merged in order to capitalize on their individual strengths. It is relatively new and quite complex, consequently there is not much proof to verify its effectiveness. However, it seems to be a useful way to think about how individuals view their work and respond to their environment. It shows that both task characteristics and the social climate can work together or against each other in affecting worker attitudes and motivation.

Job Redesign Approaches

There are many different terms for the programs used to redesign jobs. For the purpose of this report, they are classified into four categories: job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment and group options.

Job Rotation

Job rotation can fall into two categories. In the first, it involves moving people between several tasks throughout a work day to decrease the monotony and boredom of performing one task for a long period. An example might be letting three secretaries rotate the

phone answering, typing and copying duties. The main advantage here is that the employee's work can be spiced up a little with not much cost to the organization. The main disadvantage is that there may be some dissension if equity is questioned.

The second application of job rotation involves moving employees from one job to another after a specified period of time. This is designed to increase the number of skills of the employee and the flexibility of the organization. It also gives employees the broad range of experiences that might be required if the employee is to move up into management. For the individual, this approach can offset the boredom experienced once he or she gets good at a particular task. The system is not without its drawbacks, however. Training costs can increase and productivity can be decreased by moving people into new positions just as they become competent in others. Also, people who desire to be specialists, good in a particular technical task, may not like being moved into a different task every few months.

Job Enlargement

Job enlargement programs expand a job horizontally. In other words, these programs increase the number of tasks an individual will perform, thereby increasing diversity in a job. The major shortcoming of this approach is that many workers do not see this as adding variety, just more work. Therefore, this approach works best when dealing with overspecialized jobs that lack diversity.

Job Enrichment

Though some researchers include job enlargement as a subset of another approach – job enrichment – there is an important distinction to be made. While job enlargement is said to expand a job horizontally, job enrichment expands a job vertically to give the employee more control over his or her work. This means that instead of just combining assorted tasks into one job, the worker can assume some of the responsi-bility originally held by the manager. For example, giving the employee greater involvement in scheduling, customer contact, planning and evaluation are all ways of increasing employee responsibility and ownership. Another important aspect of an enriched job is that direct feedback from the job is important so individuals have the opportunity to evaluate their own performance and take appropriate action. Enriching jobs has been shown to increase employee satisfaction and reduce absenteeism and turnover, but the effect on productivity is not clear. In some cases, productivity increases, in others it decreases, but when it does decline, there seems to be a more conscientious use of resources and a higher quality product.[9]

Group Options

Over the last several years, the focus in job redesign has shifted away from the individual and more toward groups of workers. Just like the options for individual jobs above, there are different kinds of redesign for groups. The first is the *work*

[9] Robbins, p. 67.

team. In this program, a group of employees is responsible for the completion of a large task, or group of smaller tasks. The team would decide on how to rotate the jobs among individuals and for assigning specific tasks to people. The group would still have a supervisor who would coach them and oversee their activities.

A second type of group redesign is known as the *autonomous work group*. This differs from the work team described above in the same way an enriched job differs from an enlarged job in the previous discussions. In other words, the group as a whole takes over some of the responsibility of managing themselves. The group, given a goal to obtain, can control work assignments, inspection procedures, evaluation processes, and prioritization; it even may be able to select its own members. Though there is evidence that supports the connection between autonomous work groups and increased productivity, [10] there are still some potential problems. One is that there may be less chance for promotion since there are fewer management positions available. Another is that the work group may set norms or goals inconsistent with those of the organization. [11] For example, the group may focus solely on quality and productivity and ignore things like safety. [12]

Job enrichment and the application of job redesign to teams are currently considered to be the most effective at producing motivated employees.

The final type of group design initiative is the *quality circle*. This is a joint group of employees and management that meets to discuss product quality. Employees must be properly trained in communication and evaluation skills. While the organization gets an increase in product quality, workers get a feeling of participation and ownership in the process and may also get a feeling of job security as they recognize that a higher quality product is more competitive in the marketplace. Potential problems can arise if management doesn't take the process seriously, doesn't properly train the employees, or allows the sessions to involve salary, benefit or environmental problems instead of product quality issues. [13]

Conclusion

In this chapter, three frameworks for the effects of job design and organizational climate were shown, along with some possible ideas for how management might think about applying them to the workplace. Next, typical approaches to job redesign were presented. Job enrichment and the application of job redesign to teams are currently considered to be the most effective at producing motivated employees. However, the tie to organizational productivity has not been clearly demonstrated. It may, in the end, be up to the organization itself to decide what it means when it talks about increased effectiveness and then tailor these ideas to best fit its own strategic plan.

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[10] William P. Anthony, Pamela L. Perrewe, and K. Michele Kacmar, *Strategic Human Resource Management* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Johanovich, 1993), p. 250.
[11] Charles Handy, *Understanding Organizations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 286.
[12] Anthony, Perrewe and Kacmar, p. 250.
[13] Anthony, Perrewe and Kacmar, p. 251.